

OIF/OEF veterans

Been There? Done That?

How are you doing....and how is your family doing???

Media reports state that up to 18 percent of veterans returning from Iraq are screening positive for symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, or Anxiety. Of those who screened positive, only 23-40 percent sought mental health care. Most military personnel believe that if they ask for help they will be judged as “weak” or fear that others may “treat me differently” or “lose confidence in me.” Other’s perceptions, whether accurate or not, appear to create the greatest barrier to getting help in the readjustment from living in a war zone to living as a civilian again.

Problems with sleeping, overreacting to small frustrations, edginess, feeling numb, having nightmares, or remembering (almost seeing) experiences from Iraq or Afghanistan are well within the “normal” range of reacting to stress. Technically, some of these experiences are symptoms of PTSD. However, that does not necessarily mean that you have a psychiatric diagnosis, that you are “crazy,” or that you can’t cope. Rather, it means that you have been affected by your experiences in a war zone and may need help.

These reactions can complicate readjusting to home and work. They may lead to interpersonal misunderstandings which may add to a sense of unrest and isolation. Common reactions are to withdraw, drink, and avoid people, but this disrupts relationships even further. The dramatic increase in divorce rates reported by military sources since the invasion of Iraq is evidence of the impact war has on families and relationships.

Sixty-one percent of American adults experience a trauma at some point in their lives and “had PTSD” for a period of time after the event. And, most of these individuals report these reactions have remitted within several months of the event. If you or someone you love continues to have difficulty coping several months after they return, consider asking for help.

The Denver VA is offering a transition program for OIF/OEF veterans and their spouses/loved ones. Once enrolled in the VA system, OIF/OEF veterans receive two years of free care for problems associated with their service in a war zone. Families are invited to attend groups to learn about stress and develop skills in managing this sometimes difficult readjustment. For additional information contact 303-393-2835 or e-mail: pamela.staves@med.va.gov